Part Two

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GARDENING AS A CURE

By ELAINE VALENTINE

Regaining Health Among the Flowers

How This Work Has Transformed Many Neurasthenic and Sickly Persons Into Hearty, Robust Women

I HAD been ill, very ill, and it seemed afterward as if annoyances multiplied within the four walls of my home. I saw the dust accumulating, speck by speck, on the polish of my mahogany; I heard the chips fall from the dishes in the pantry. The noise of a mouse in the walls at night caused me to awake and to dread until dawn the on-coming of another day, or perchance the out-coming of the mouse.

The charitably minded members of my family had frequent occasion to refer to my high-strung temperament; but, for myself, I realized that I had descended into the dark valley of nerves, the nerves that arise and dominate, and the power of which none understands until he has lived under their control.

As the winter passed and the scent of spring came in the air, I felt a restlessness that fairly ran riot with that of the tiny, unfolding leaves, acting as if they had not a moment to spare. I began to notice about the spring also a nervous energy, which indeed provided the first sensation of real sympathy that had touched me since before the days of my illness. The springtime subtly lured me out of my darkened realm; fascinated me with the fragrance of the earth after a shower, and made me envious of its activity.

I had never before been much of an observer of nature; I had taken the seasons as they came, for granted, changing my clothes accordingly. I now watched the spring work. I saw the myriad of helpers it called to its aid, and how steadfastly, in spite of rebuffs, it pursued its way. In its great wealth of energy I lost unaccountably my feeling of unused strength. My nerves grew stronger.

As a practical expression of my desire I built a garden. Not a large one; a rather small, intimate one, in which no sprouting seed or faded leaf could escape my eye. I built it on the one bit of available space that I had, contenting myself in its possession, instead of wishing it of different size or outline. Many a child, perchance, would have planned a better garden, and made a more up-to-date choice of seeds and plants. But there was no sense of rivalry in this garden, no striving after unusual effects. Merely it was to be my garden of silent sympathy; a place in which to lose my peevishness.

After the seeds were sown and the young plants set in their places, I drank to the full draft of patience; for seeds do not sprout, arise and bloom all in a day; even plants require some time to accommodate themselves to the soil and to test the temper of the season. I also began to observe the wind, whether it were friendly, or cold and piercing; to smile when the sun stretched itself in lengthened measure over garden, and to watch the great expanse of blue with something of the interest that I had formerly given to my friends' gowns and the manner of coiling their heads. The sky, indeed, entered into my life, not only as something of beauty, but as an element in which I held a part. For the first time in my life I welcomed the raindrops, since they would sink into the soil and cause my seeds to sprout.

Then came days of thinning out seedlings, of using a little fertilizer here and there, of routing insect pests and of struggles with weeds. How busy I was! There was no longer time to worry about the chips that fell from the dishes. With a word of caution concerning their care I thought that I had paid them their due. At night, after weeding, I was too limb-weary to be aroused by the mouse in the side walls.

"I believe you are growing roses in your cheeks," said a member of my family, "instead of in your garden. You are looking worlds better."

"I am like our neighbor, Mrs. Gray," I responded; "I have fallen in love with a garden. It has made me young again."

"And you appear much less nervous," persisted the member of my family.

"Nervous!" I had grown to dislike the word. It offended me more than the thought of rust on the hollyhocks, a matter with which I had contended by spraying the plants in late April and again in May with Bordeaux mixture.

Although I labored so hard at times as to be exceedingly weary physically, the work seemed always under the guise of play. Visiting friends, finding me so well and happy, declared that I must have taken to some form of mental control, and their interest increased when I related that I had found my Mecca in a garden. It was astonishing to me how strong my plants were in personality, how they resisted weakness or disease.

In midsummer the garden became a blaze of color. It attracted such gay visitors as the ruby-throated hummingbird, the hummingbird-moth and myriads of butterflies. It drew to it all that was merry and salutary. It charmed the small, roguish boy of the neighborhood, almost to its own undoing; for, while ever merry, he had no reverence, and thought the most cherished bud appeared better in his buttonhole than on its rightful stalk.

Usually I arose early in the morning to pick my flowers, those that were arranged for the house, or to make into bouquets to give away. The garden then sparkled with vigor and freshness. Most often it was toward twilight that I watered the flowers, for during a dry spell that is one of their daily demands. Then all appeared to be quieting down to meet the hours of darkness. When the weather turned cold or damp I noticed that many plants actually made preparation for the night by changing the position of their leaves, so that the cold could not strike them to their disadvantage, or by closing the petals of their flowers.

In the end my garden turned me from a nervous, over-sensitive woman into one of saner ways and strengthened sinews.

Facts have come to me concerning the benefits that other women have received from daily work in their gardens. An old friend, a man in middle life, asked me one day: "Have you noticed the change in Winifred?"

He spoke of his wife, a woman of much charm and cultivation, one who for two years had been so deeply stricken by the death of her only son that grave doubts had arisen about her sanity. She took no interest in any occurrences of the day; she would see no one of her friends; she thought only of the boy who had been the joy of her life.

In response to my friend's question, I answered: "I hear that she works in her garden several hours each day."

"Several hours!" he exclaimed. "She spends the whole of the mornings there, and often returns to it in the afternoon. She welcomes her friends to show them the improvements she has made; she drives out again with me, commenting continually on the things we see. Her interest in general affairs seems once more to be established. The garden has been her salvation."

Through observation of Nature's ways, Winifred not only grew to look upon the death of her son as something necessary to a fuller, more complete life, but she learned to regard her own health as a thing desired, and of importance to her neighbors. Today she so abounds in health and sanity of thought that she seems to radiate it wherever she goes. The lesson, nevertheless, was not learned in a day.

Another tale of garden triumph is current in the town where I live. It also is about a mother who lost her boy, a lad of fifteen years, well grown, strong, an ideal son in every way. That he would succumb so early to death was the last thought that entered the mother's head. They were numbered among the plain people, having no highly cultivated estate as the wife, Winifred, but possessing merely a small garden, situated at the back of their house. In it they raised vegetables for their daily use. Between the vegetable rows of their garden uprose many Shirley poppies; hollyhocks marked its farthest boundary.

After the death of the boy, the garden died completely. The mother felt that she could not enter it alone. The spot that had been her recreation and her delight became the place most constantly shunned. So passed three long years.

Then a sister's child was bereft of both father and mother, and his sorry plight made so strong an appeal that the mother of the lost boy took him into her home and adopted him as her own.

Toward spring she led him, almost unconsciously, into the garden. He was still a baby, five years old, but she told him what a beautiful place it had once been. She took a spade and showed him how her boy had dug the holes for plants; she pointed out to him where he had put the early radishes, and where the cabbages had grown. It was a gay little chap that she had adopted, and he flitted from one place to another like a butterfly. The mother felt pleased to have him with her, and the thought presented itself for the first time that her own son would be saddened by seeing the garden so neglected. "I must put something into this little one's life to occupy him," she thought. "I will remake the garden as a thank-offering for my merry companion."

This was not an easy task, for the boy had known more about plants than the mother. It was he who had made all the decisions. She now worked with much uncertainty, always wondering if he would have done the things she contemplated. Some days the baby mind helped her out considerably. "Pretty flowers here," he said; "many pretty flowers." He was eager to carry the watering pot, and he soon learned to regard as sacred the places where seeds were sown. He showed that in time he also might prove a worthy helper.

Gradually the sadness and the sharp pain of memory left the garden. It became again the place of lusty, growing things, of bees and butterflies, of happy hearts.

Lately it has come to my knowledge that one of the most conspicuous women in England saved her life from wreckage through the health-giving grace of a garden.

Owing to the prominence of her family, and the traditions of her birth, she was engaged when little more than a schoolgirl to a peer of the realm, an arrangement that to her was utterly distasteful. The peer was double her age, a man of no charm of personality and a renowned lover of the material pleasures of life. The girl was idealistic, high-strung and nervous to a degree.

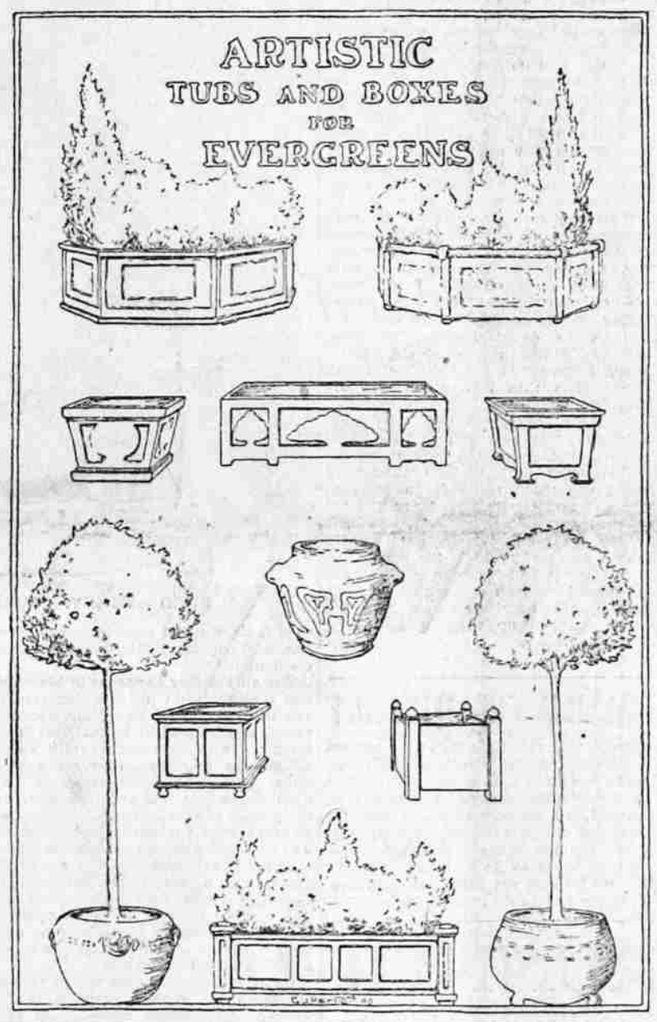
A few days before the wedding she revolted openly. It then became a matter of nine days' gossip that the peer had been thrown over. Her relatives and friends referred to her as "Poor Amy," and as "Amy, who is a bit queer." Indeed, she felt herself to be so amid the general disapproval that broke over her head. She dreaded to go anywhere, since everywhere she felt that she was adversely criticized. At length her nerves gave way and she had a severe fit of illness.

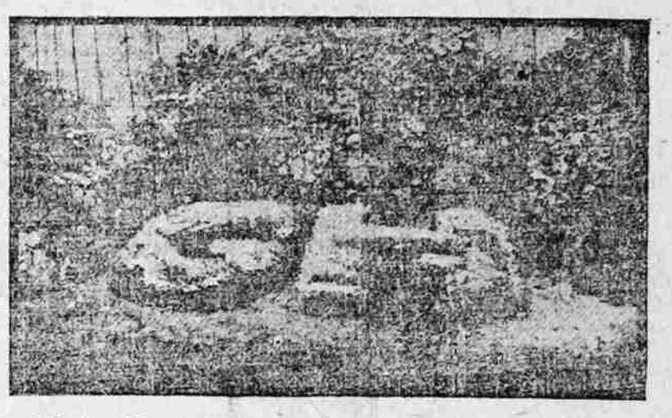
One of the first things that interested her after the crisis was a bouquet of jonquils. They seemed to open up a train of thought that she had never had before. She wondered about them a great deal.

Some months later it was stated in a society paper that this erratic lady was growing daffodils in extraordinary numbers, and that she had, moreover, sent men to foreign countries to hunt for rare specimens of these plants. Indeed, her collection of daffodils soon grew to be as much of an interest to horticulturists as the breaking of her engagement with the peer had been to society.

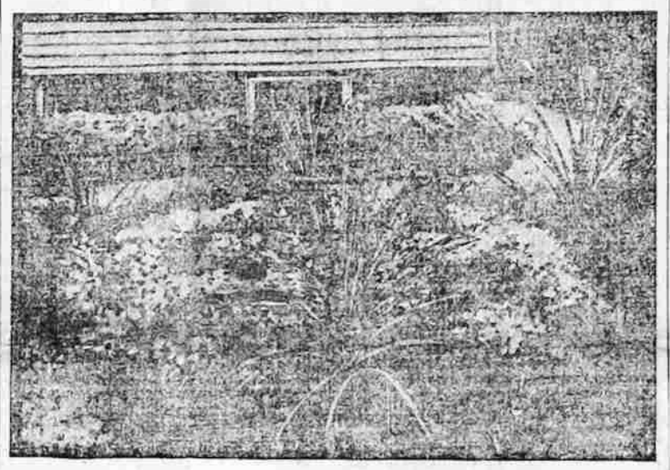
When a woman, either through loss or lack of interest in the things of her life, or through a natural love of flowers, gravitates toward a garden, it soon becomes a desire with her to work in it, rather than to sit passively by and see it grow under the care of others. This desire, then, is the first call to action, and in this action, with the necessary accompaniment of thought and knowledge, there are lost the corroding annoyances, the subtle griefs and displeasures, that have formerly held the mind in bondage.

A woman's work in a garden should be tempered with moderation, even gentleness, an attribute so potent that the Persians claim it can lead an elephant by a hair. To rush madly into garden work, beginning early while the dew lies heavy on the ground; or to lean over, thinning out seedlings, or transplanting, for long periods at a time, is but to outline the path for rheumatism and backache.

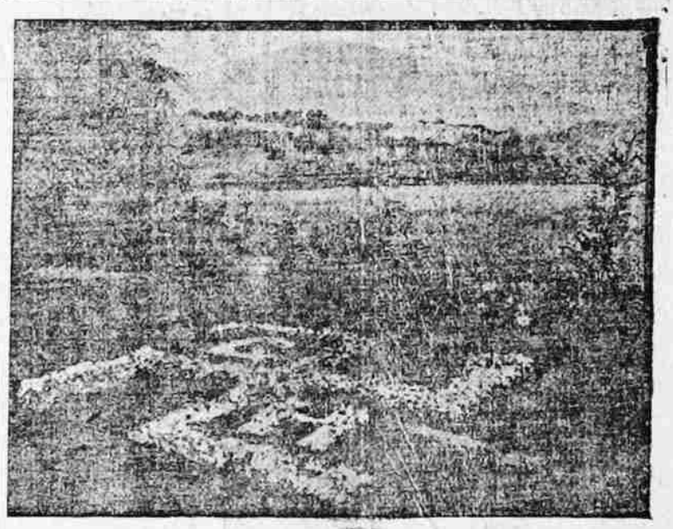




A Border of Dwarf Ageratum, With Closely Set Dwarf Plume Grass Filling in the Outlines of the Letters, While Double, Rose-Flowered Portulacaceae Fill in Between the Arms of the H. The Design is duplicated on the fence back of the Bed, the Initials Being of Cypress Vine Running Over a Wire Frame, Against a Background of Nasturtiums.



A Decorative Design, the Letters Being in Madame Lolleroi Geraniums, Surrounded by Yellow Coleus, With Four Plume Like Dracoenas On the Outer Edges.



Swastika Cross and Initials in Sweet Alyssum and Pansies, the Color Scheme Being Red, White and Blue.

What Constitutes a Good School Lunch?

Quality of the Bread of Prime Importance—Suggestions for the Children's Lunch Box.

IF you have children who must eat their lunches at school you are asking yourself just now what should be put into the lunch basket in order to make the midday meal wholesome and good "to study on." You are asking how the food should be packed in order that it may look tempting when the basket is opened and may prove to be appetizing. These questions you are asking of yourself and answering for yourself with the help of what you can find in books and magazines on the subject of food for growing children. But are you asking other questions just as important and joining with other women to insist on having them answered? Are you asking where the school children eat their lunches? Is there a pleasant, attractive room provided, or must they eat them at the desks where they have been sitting all the morning, or in hall, cloakroom or basement? If a new school building is being erected are you asking that space shall be set aside for a lunchroom and for a little kitchen where soup or cocoa or other warm dish may be prepared? Perhaps you are wondering why the preparation of part or all of a school meal would not be a very practical and interesting lesson in domestic science. There are other inquiries, too, of a different sort. They relate to that little shop across the street from the school, or around the corner, where the boys and girls spend their pennies. Is it safe and is the food sold there clean and wholesome?

The Contents of the Lunch Box.

The answer to the first question, "What constitutes a good school lunch?" is part of the answer to the larger question, "What constitutes a good meal for a child?" and to the still larger question, "What in general constitutes a good meal?" In the first place, a good meal should be carefully planned as well as properly cooked. I like to think of a well-put-together meal as containing something liquid, something starchy and something meaty or "tissue forming," as we have been taught to say; something fat and something fibery, something sweet and something savory. How does that apply to a school lunch? In answering this question we will leave the liquid part of the meal to be considered last, because that is the part of all parts that should be provided at school, both for the reason that a warm liquid helps stir up the circulation, thus helping digestion and leaving the head clear for study, and also for the reason that the liquid portion is inconvenient to carry from home.

Something Starchy.

The backbone of every good meal, school lunch or any other, is good, thoroughly baked bread. Soggy bread is bad for anyone, and it is particularly bad for children, for their teeth need exercise. That is the universal opinion of dentists and physicians. Rolls, the long narrow finger rolls preferably, make good sandwiches, partly because they are crusty and partly because by cutting them open and removing just a little of the crumb you can make a good-sized place in which to put chopped meat or other filling. Remember the children when you make bread and make some of these rolls or buy some occasionally. Boston brown bread makes good sandwiches. It combines well with cottage cheese and lettuce. Make a small loaf for sandwiches in a baking powder can at the same time you make the larger supply. Zwieback and many of the prepared cereals which now come in the form of crackers are good food for children, but they are rather dry and also crumbly. The best way to pack them is in the little tin boxes in which mints or wafers come. Try occasionally making very thin slices of zwieback and putting jelly or jam between them. Zwieback is made by toasting bread in a very slow oven. It should be crisp and a golden brown. Zephyrettes with cream cheese between them furnish a pleasing variety if used occasionally. I class plain cakes with these starchy foods because in the well-constructed meal they do not take the place of the sweet which seems necessary to top off with. Here, too, belong doughnuts and coffee cake and many kinds of cookies.

Something Meaty.

In addition to breads the well-planned meal, with an occasional exception, should contain one of the following: Milk, eggs, cheese, fish, poultry, nuts, meat or beans. Of these milk is most important for the young, for it is rich, not alone in tissue-forming foods, but also in the materials which make bones and teeth. If school boards can do no more they can at least provide for having good milk sold in the schools at cost.

Meat for the school lunch should be thinly sliced or chopped and mixed with salad dressing. Save a little of the mint sauce served with the roast lamb or of the caper sauce served with boiled mutton or the horseradish sauce served with beef, or the tomato sauce served with veal to give a touch of spice to the sandwich filling. Try always to have boiled dressing on hand, or mayonnaise if you use it, for that makes it possible to make a good filling out of a little meat or fish. Mixed with veal or chicken and combined with lettuce it is best, but it can be used with any meat or with cheese, or with baked beans or chopped nuts, or with nuts and cream cheese mixed, or with hard-boiled eggs or with a mixture of hard-boiled eggs and fish, or with lettuce or watercress. There are, in fact, few foods with which salad dressing cannot be combined to make a good sandwich filler.

If there is a place for a jelly glass in the lunch box moist foods like cottage cheese or baked beans or salad may constitute the meaty portion of the meal. So far as the food value of custards is concerned, they come under the head of flesh-forming foods if they are made with plenty of eggs. The days when they form the dessert, therefore, are good days on which to serve non-meaty sandwiches, plain bread and butter, perhaps, or lettuce or cress sandwiches.

Something Fat.

This does not mean something greasy, but something containing one of the good, wholesome fats—butter, egg yolks, cream, bacon, olive oil—which all children need. Butter is an expensive food, but it cannot be considered wasted if children eat it. If you have a child that needs building up put lots of butter on his bread, disguising it, if necessary, by putting plenty of other things with it. Thin slices of crisp bacon combine with lettuce to make wholesome sandwiches. A very small amount of sour cream will make a filling if it is drained as for cottage cheese, but without being heated. If heated much of the fat is lost. It may be seasoned with salt alone or mixed with chopped olives, pimentos or raisins. Remember that the souring of milk and cream purify them and make them safe, for the germs that make them sour destroy any harmful germs that are in the sweet milk. Cottage cheese, however, which has been carelessly handled, as it sometimes is in grocery shops, is as bad as any other carelessly handled food.

Egg yolks are rich in fat, each containing about a tablespoonful. They are rich, too, in iron. They "make red blood," as the saying goes, and are the best of foods for anemic children. If you have yolks left over from your baking cook them in a double boiler, either alone or, if they are whole, in water. The low temperature of the double boiler prevents them from turning dark. Use them in sandwiches or in potato salad or mash them and make into salad dressing, according to the rule which you can find in any good cook book. It is always safe to use less vinegar, mustard and pepper than the rule calls for, as young people do not care for highly seasoned foods and are better off without them. The following salad dressing offers a good way to use yolks and skim milk, another valuable food and one often wasted.

Salad Dressing.

One-half tablespoonful of salt, one teaspoonful of mustard (or less), one tablespoonful of sugar, one and one-half cupfuls of skim milk and egg yolks combined, using from four to eight of the latter; one-fourth cupful of vinegar. Mix the dry ingredients, add the other ingredients and cook over water till thick.

A large number of egg yolks can also be used in baked custards with either whole or skim milk. When making custard, always make a few cup custards for the lunch box. Use the little enameled ware cups, which are light and strong, or aluminum molds. These can be used also for lemon jelly or other puddings of which you wish to prepare small portions that can be saved in good form for the lunches. The little individual portions are much more attractive than portions of a large pudding. If the pudding is one that keeps well let a day elapse between the time it is served at home and the time it appears in the lunch box. It will seem more novel.

Something Fibery.

By fiber is meant that substance which makes apples and grapes and cucumbers hold their shape though they contain little but water, or water and sugar. There is all the way through them a network of a tough, elastic substance, usually called cellulose. When this is taken into the body it acts very much as excelsior does in a packing case. It keeps the heavier parts of the foods from settling down upon each other. It is seldom digested, but it is an invaluable help to the digestion of other foods. It may be supplied in the form of lettuce, watercress or cucumbers in sandwiches; in the form of celery or radishes, or in the form of fresh, dried or stewed fruit.

Apples, oranges, pears, peaches and berries are desirable, not only because they are refreshing, but because of their fiber. Berries keep best tightly sealed in a bottle or a jelly glass and without sugar. Dried fruits—dates, figs, raisins and a good quality of prunes—are equally wholesome and much easier to carry. Baked apples may be carried in jelly glasses. So may apple sauce and stewed fruits if they are properly prepared. Dried fruits should be cooked without sugar till they are nearly done. The sugar added at the last tends to take up the juice and makes a syrupy, rather than a watery compound. For sauce apples should be cooked, a few pieces at a time, in a syrup of sugar and water. By the time the last of the apples are done the syrup will be like jelly. Such apple sauce is easily transported.

Something Sweet.

When you are making cake, remember to make a few small ones for the lunches, and do not fear that they will be too rich if frosted. A little sugar is a valuable part of a school luncheon, because it is easily absorbed and quickly made ready for use in the body. Think how different it is from pastry. In that the flour and the fat must first be separated from their close companionship, and after that each must be acted upon by the digestive juices. The sugar is, at the time it is eaten, in very much the condition that the flour of pastry reaches after all these processes. Put just a little sugar of some kind into the lunch box, two or three pieces of pure candy or of loaf sugar, or a little maple sugar or sweet chocolate. Sweet cookies come under this head, too. As to pastry, save that till a day when the afternoon is to be spent in festivities of some kind, not in study—when there is to be speaking or an excursion to the woods. Then make some turnovers, inclosing the filling safely between crusts. Children like these, and they are easier to carry than pieces of pie.

Something Savory.

This need not always be put in as an extra; it may be introduced in one of the many sandwich fillings of which mention has been made. Ham is a savory and dried beef and bacon and cheese. So are acid fruits if the term "savory" be stretched a little. If the sandwiches and the dessert are both rather neutral in flavor it may be well to add a little sour jelly or spiced preserves. The jelly can be put up at the regular jelly-making season. There are numberless little jars and wide-mouthed bottles coming into our houses now that can be used for the individual portions of jelly. Covered with paraffin, the small amounts keep in good condition without drying.

Something Liquid.

The question of "something liquid" for the school luncheon brings up the whole matter of the policy of the school with reference to the food of the pupils. We will suppose first that the authorities do not help and that every mother must settle the matter for herself. Under these circumstances the children themselves should be consulted. If they prefer to have boxes that can be closed up flat when empty, and thus leave them comparatively hand-free on the way home, to having liquids and custards and other foods that must be carried in dishes with their luncheons, that should settle the matter. In many of the consolidated rural schools, however, transportation is provided. Here, and in other cases where pupils ride back and forth, the size and weight of the lunch basket need not be considered. Milk in these cases should be a part of the luncheon in winter, and milk or lemonade or other fruit juices in summer.

The flavoring material for lemonade can be made up in quantities and kept on hand. Boil a cupful of sugar in a pint of water for about fifteen minutes. Cool and add one-third of a cupful of lemon juice. Keep on ice till needed. To this may be added other fruit juices or the syrup from canned fruits. The water can be added at school. Lemon or orange jelly and many of the more watery fruits should, in making up the bill-of-fare, be considered as liquid, because they are chiefly water.

The Luncheon as a Whole.

In the following sample luncheons the numbers refer to the necessary parts of a well-planned meal: (1) the starchy; (2) the meaty; (3) the fatty; (4) the fibery; (5) the sweet; (6) the savory; (7) the liquid or watery.

Suggested Lunches.

Milk (2) (7); ham sandwiches (1) (2) (3) (6); an apple and two or three dates (4); a frosted cake (5).

Milk (2) (7); egg sandwiches with salad dressing (1) (2) (3) (6); apple sauce (4); plain cake (1); maple sugar (5); grape juice (7); cheese sandwiches (1) (2) (3) (6); stewed prunes or apricots (4); cookies (1); sweet chocolate (5).

Unbalanced Lunches.

The lunches given to children are frequently faulty through excess of some one or other kind of food. For example:

Too Meaty.

Milk (2) (7), hard-boiled egg (2), meat or cheese sandwiches (1) (2) (3), custard (2) (3), plain cake (1).

Too Starchy and Too Dry.

Plain meat sandwiches (1) (2) (3), doughnuts (1), crackers (1), plain cake (1).

Too Fat.

Milk (2) (7), veal sandwiches with salad dressing (1) (3) (6), doughnuts (1), nuts (2) (3).

Too Fibery.

Lettuce sandwiches (1) (3) (4) (6), orange (4) (7), radishes (4), raisin cake (1) (4).

Too Sweet.

Milk (2) (7), cookies (1), jelly sandwiches (1) (5), frosted cake (1) (5).

Too Moist.

Milk (2) (7), pear (4) (7), potato salad (1) (3) (6), lemon jelly (7), bread and butter (1) (3).

Too Spicy.

Meat sandwiches with highly seasoned dressing (1) (2) (3) (6), pickles (6), mince pie (1) (3) (6).